

Everything I Learned About Perfins, I learned from Mr. Boatwright

Perfins are stamps that have had holes intentionally punched in them in a pattern that forms initials, insignia or devices. The word "perfin" is a philatelic neologism formed as a contraction of "perforated initials or insignia."

In philatelic literature, you might also see perfins called "punched-perforated stamps," "branded stamps" or "punctured stamps."



"Perfins" is much easier to say and is the more generally accepted term in the United States. In Britain or in British literature, you might also see perfins called "spifs," which is an anagram for "stamps punched with initials of firms."

The attractions of collecting perfins are numerous.

You can make your perfins collection as catholic or as parochial as you chose: collect all perfins of the world, or collect perfins from only one country or area.

You can collect perfins on individual stamps, or you can collect them on cover as postal history.

Perfins are usually inexpensive because nonperfin stamp collectors generally find them undesirable.

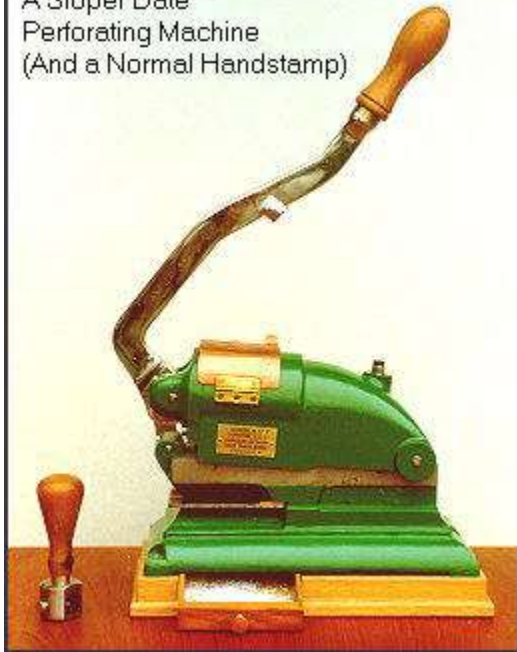
That doesn't mean that a given perfin that you are looking for will be easy to find. Perfins actually offer great challenge without great expense.

Also, because the stamp is only the medium and the perfin is the message, you needn't buy a stamp with a high catalog value for a perfin that you can find on an inexpensive stamp.

Because general stamp collectors consider perfins to be damaged goods, inexpensively priced finds are possible in accumulations or in nonspecialist dealer stocks.

Perfins were born in March 1868 when the postal authority of Great Britain first authorized firms and governmental agencies and departments to punch identifying initials in the stamps kept on hand for franking business mail.

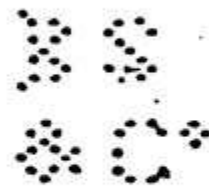
A Sloper Date
Perforating Machine
(And a Normal Handstamp)



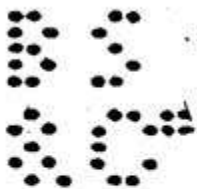
The intent was to prevent pilferage of the stamps by employees.

The first machine for making perfinns was patented in Great Britain by Joseph Sloper that same year.

Some early perforating machines had a single die and could only perforate one stamp at a time. To save labor, larger perforators were quickly developed that could perforate five or 10 stamps at a stroke.



Typical pattern made
using "diamond" grid



Typical pattern made
using "square" grid
of holes.

Perfins quickly became the most popular type of private security device, replacing early attempts, such as embossing and underprinting.



The 1-penny rose-red Queen Victoria stamp, Great Britain Scott 33, was the postal workhorse of the day, and more than 7,000 different perfins are known on this stamp.

On the left is a "GWR" perfin of the Great Western Railway shown from the back of a Penny Red stamp.

The pattern of this perfin was laid out with the "w" lower than the other two letters, so that the holes of the perfin would not deface the image of the queen on the front side of the stamp.

Because the perfin is the thing, perfin stamps are most often mounted and viewed from the back. Perfins, when viewed from the front of the stamp, are often difficult to distinguish because of the stamp design.

In days of yore, some collectors mounted two examples of the same stamp with the same perfin side-by-side, one face up and one face down. Today, some make a photocopy of the back of the stamp and mount or display it alongside the stamp

Perfins were used early and often in Great Britain, with the result that there are more than 22,000 different perfins known on British stamps.

This compares with about 12,000 for Germany, 6,400 for the United States, and 3,000 each for Austria and France.

The success of perfins in Great Britain quickly spread the practice to other countries.

Belgium authorized perfins in 1872; Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland in 1876; and Austria in 1877.

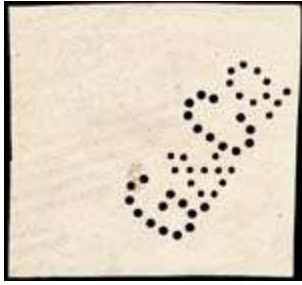


Two Austrian 5-krone black Parliament Building stamps with "H.A.G WIEN" perfins are shown on the left.

Note that on one stamp the letters of the perfin are forward and on the other they are backward.

Sometimes perfins are made to be read from the front of the stamp, and sometimes they are made to be read from the back. They may also be made aligned with the stamp design, or inverted or sideways in relation to it.

Sometimes it seems that the operators making the perfins didn't care which way they read, as long as the holes got punched into the stamp.



The "G & Co" perfin on the imperforate Czechoslovakian 40-haleru red-orange Hradcany Castle stamp shown on the left is unusual in that it was applied diagonally in relation to the stamp design.

The perfins on the Austrian stamps shown are sideways in relation to the stamp designs.

The United States came late to the practice of stamp perfins, first authorizing their use April 9, 1908.

The first authorization called for perfins with impractically small holes, so the authorization was amended in the *Postal Bulletin* of May 5, 1908, to allow bigger ones: "perforations shall not exceed one-thirty-second of an inch in diameter, and the whole space of the identifying device shall not exceed one-half inch square."

An indispensable tool for collecting U.S. perfins is the *Catalog of United States Perfins*, edited by John M. Randall and published by the Perfins Club.

The catalog lists, pictures and describes all known U.S. perfins; tells who they were used by; gives their period of use; and assigns a scarcity rating from "A" to "F," with "A" being for perfins with 10 or fewer known and "F" being for "perfins (so plentiful) that you could wallpaper your house with (them)."



A 1¢ green George Washington stamp, U.S. Scott 804, with a "DPH" perfin is shown on the left.

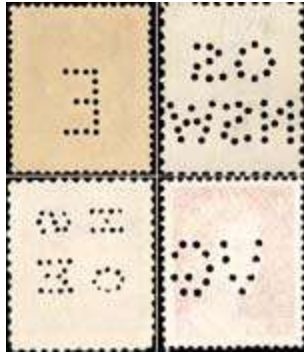
This perfin is assigned No. D88 in the U.S. perfin catalog. It belonged to the Department of Health in Harrisburg, Pa., and was in use during 1926-65. With a scarcity rating of "E," it is not quite wallpaper fodder.

In addition to letters and numbers, perfins are also made as patterns or geometric shapes.



The 33¢ Flag Over City stamp shown has a Lone Star pattern, perfin catalog No. Des. 62, which is still being used by the State of Texas post office, Austin, Texas. The perfin catalog gives it a scarcity rating of "D."

In addition to private firms and government offices, some countries have used perfins to produce their Official stamps.



A variety of Official stamps with perfins are shown a Bavarian 10-pfennig scarlet Prince Regent Luitpold stamp with an "E" perfin; a New South Wales 1/- violet-brown Kangaroo stamp with an "O S N S W" perfin; a Canadian 3¢ rose-violet King George VI stamp with an "O H M S" perfin, Scott 0252; and an Australian 4¢ red Queen Elizabeth II stamp with a "V G" perfin.

The Bavarian, New South Wales and Canadian stamps are Official stamps of national or colonial postal administrations.

The Australian stamp is an official stamp of the state government of Victoria.

Note that the Canadian Official perfin stamp is Scott-listed, but the other three are not.



Perfins and postal history combine on a cover shown.

The envelope bears a corner card of the Frisco railway emblem in the return address area, beneath which "Chandler Okla" has been added by typewriter.

The cover is franked with a 3¢ deep violet Thomas Jefferson stamp, Scott 807, with an "F L" perfin, which the perfin catalog identifies as No. F95, used by the St. Louis San Francisco Railway in use from 1938 to 1975.

The identity of the perfin is confirmed by the envelope's corner card (return address imprint).

The cover bears a Monett and Oklahoma City Train No. 3 railway post office postmark dated Nov. 19, 1954.